



LEFT Substantial pilasters, limestone detailing, and brickwork all add up to create a timeless exterior for this Prairie-style Elmhurst townhome. BELOW Finely crafted millwork and sensitive design contributes to the organic aura.

Prairie Perfection

An elegant duplex townhome splurges on gorgeous woods

BY DARCY LEWIS | PHOTOS BY JON HUELSKAMP, LANDMARK PHOTOGRAPHY



Fans of Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie-style homes will be glad to know that the genre is alive, well, and being re-interpreted for the twenty-first century. In fact, Stephen Jaskowiak, principal of West Studio Architects in Elmhurst, has devoted his business to bringing the ideals of Wright and his colleagues to today's clients. "My firm focuses exclusively on Prairie-style architecture, which seeks to be in harmony with nature and itself," he says.

This 3,500-square-foot townhome follows Jaskowiak's philosophy. Intended to fit subtly into its neighborhood just west of Elmhurst's bustling downtown, the building's sensitive design and quality materials set it apart. The triple limestone banding first seen on the front elevation's pilasters reappears throughout the interior as sumptuous custom oak trim. And the exterior's Tree of Life emblem—a signature of Arts and Crafts design—becomes the highlight of the interior entry in the form of a backlit, stained-glass ceiling panel above matching custom inlay on the floor directly below.

The entry is an enticing feature. "It pulls you in so that you don't even realize you're in a hallway that is longer and narrower than it looks," he says. "It could have been very plain and ho-hum, but we used all the decorative elements together to create a coherent, vibrant space, which is the nature of organic architecture."

He uses varying ceiling heights to control the flow and mood throughout the home. "We play with ceiling heights to bring the home down to scale where appropriate and to enhance the impression of a grander space elsewhere," he says. For instance, the floorplan of the second floor, which serves as the home's main living area, is almost an hourglass in shape. In the front, the spacious living room and dining area flow

BUILDER
West Studio

HOME LOCATION
Elmhurst

SUPPLIERS
Prairie Loft



THIS PAGE A solid wood fireplace surround coordinates beautifully with clean-lined furniture in the family room. TOP, RIGHT Rich granite, millwork, and trim help the kitchen blend in with the rest of the home without skimping on the latest technology. The nearby dining area includes a granite-topped bar with a wine refrigerator, perfect for entertaining. The family room opens to a balcony with Tree of Life railings, a famous Prairie School design.

together. Custom built-in cabinets and free-floating columns give the dining room a feeling of separation from the living room, though the same three-part oak trim connects the rooms. The home's central core, consisting of the stairwell, elevator and other service areas, feels purposely narrower, as if to propel the visitor toward the back of the house, where a combined kitchen, breakfast area, and family room open up expansively.

Jaskowiak dropped the ceiling height in the breakfast area to give it ease and informality, while the family room is delineated from the finely detailed kitchen by a pair of square columns and half-walls. Just off the family room is a balcony with custom Tree of Life railings, once again unifying the interior and exterior designs.

It's no accident that the home—from colors to materials to proportions—seems so unified. "The way we work is to envision the completed space right from the start," Jaskowiak says. "We're thinking about ceiling heights, furnishings, and finishes as we begin the entire design.

That's what organic architecture is all about."

The home's abundant, customized wood trim is another unifying element. "We try to make each design a complete composition, with nothing generic about it," he says. "That means we have to focus on custom millwork and trim. Otherwise, we couldn't carry our vision through if we had to try to coordinate many disparate, standardized elements."

Jaskowiak characterizes the vertical plan as an urban concept in the suburbs. "I could totally see a downsizing couple loving this home," he says. "They want less overall space but have no intention of giving up the amenities and luxuries they've been accustomed to for years." And with this home—thanks to its oak-lined elevator and two-car attached garage in the rear—those luxuries remain marvelously accessible. **MH**

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